

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

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EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS PFOR, LE, IS
SUBJECT: ISRAELI CONCERN ABOUT SITUATION IN SOUTH LEBANON

1. THE PUBLICITY GIVEN TO THE CHARG'S MEETING WITH ALLON SUNDAY NIGHT AND THE SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH DINITZ YESTERDAY HAS SERVED TO INCREASE PUBLIC APPREHENSION IN ISRAEL AS TO WHAT IS HAPPENING IN SOUTH LEBANON. CHIEF OF STAFF GENERAL GUR WAS QUOTED AS HAVING SAID YESTERDAY THAT ISRAEL IS IN THE PROCESS OF TAKING DECISIONS REGARDING THE PRESENCE OF SYRIAN TROOPS SOUTH OF THE RED LINE: "THERE IS NOTHING MORE TO SAY ABOUT IT. IT IS A TIME FOR DECISION, NOT EXPLANATION." DEFENSE MINISTER PERES PUT IT THIS WAY: "DIPLOMATIC PROCEDURES WHICH WE ARE TRYING TO EXPLORE TO THE FULL ARE NOW UNDER WAY, BUT OUR PROBLEM IS NOT SYRIA OR LEBANON ALONE, BUT A SET OF REALTIONS WITH THE NEW U.S. ADMINISTRATION, WHICH WE WOULD RATHER NOT START OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT."

2. THIS SORT OF TALK IS, OF COURSE, EAD IN THE ARAB CAPITALS AND WILL DO LITTLE TO CLAM THE SITUATION. ISRAELI MEDIA REPORTS, WHICH ARE FREQUENTLY INSPIRED, MAINTAIN THAT THE CREDIBILITY OF THE U.S. IS NOW AT STAKE, A POINT WHICH ALLON MADE. THIS STATEMENT, WHICH WE CONSIDER INDEFENSIBLE, IS COUPLED WITH REFERENCES TO
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THE DEADLINE THE ISRAELIS HAVE NOW GIVEN US, AND WHICH ALSO HAS BEEN PBULICIZED, NAMELY THAT THE SYRIAN TROOPS MUST PULL BACK BEFORE THE SECRETARY'S ARRIVAL. AS ZEEV SCHIFF WROTE IN HAARETZ TODAY: "THE DIPLOMATIC CHANNELS WERE TRANSPARENT AND THE MATTER, THEREFORE, BORE THE CHARACTER OF AN ULTIMATUM." THUS THERE HAS ARISEN WHAT IS IN MANY WAYS A CONTRIVED CRISIS, IN WHICH THE ISRAELI

GOVERNMENT BY ITS PUBLIC STATEMENTS HAS GOT ITSELF OUT ON A LIMB - AND WANTS TO BE SURE OF OUR COMPANY THERE.

3. THERE ARE HINTS AS TO WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF THE DEADLINE PASSES WITHOUT A TROOP PULLBACK. THE TWO POPULAR AFTER-NOON PAPERS, YEDIOT AND MAARIV, AGREED TODAY THAT IN THAT CASE "THE NEED MAY ARISE TO TAKE MILITARY ACTION." JUST WHAT THIS ACTION WOULD BE, HOW LONG IT WOULD LAST, AND WHAT IT MIGHT ACHIEVE - NOT TO MENTION ITS POSSIBLE WIDER CONSEQUENCES - HAVE NOT BEEN PUBLICLY REVEALED OR EVEN MUCH SPECULATED ABOUT. FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE HERE, WE SO NOT BELIEVE THAT ISRAEL WOULD ATTEMPT A MILITARY INTERVENTION IN LEBANON WHILE WALDHEIM IS IN THE AREA AND THE SECRETARY EN ROUTE. UNLESS, OF COURSE, THEY WANT TO TORPEDO MOVEMENT TOWARD A BROADER SETTLEMENT, AND THIS DOES NOT SEEM LIKELY. (AT THE SAME TIME, NO ONE HERE HAS SERIOUSLY SUGGESTED AS YET THAT SECRETARY VANCE WILL COMPLETE HIS MID-EAST VISIT WITHOUT THE NABATIYAH ISSUE HAVING BEEN RESOLVED, I.E., THAT ISRAEL MIGHT THEN NEED TO EXERCISE ITS MILITARY OPTION. THIS IN ITSELF INDICATES THAT AT THIS TIME THE ISRAELI DEADLINE MAY BE PRIMARILY A TACTICAL DEMAND.)

4. SHOULD THE DEADLINE PASS - AND IT IS ONLY A WEEK AWAY - WITHOUT A SYRIAN PULLBACK, IT APPEARS PROBABLE THAT AN ATTEMPT WILL BE MADE HERE TO PORTRAY THIS AS A U.S. DEFEAT. RABIN WILL NOT WANT TO TAKE THE BLAME ONTO HIS GOVERNMENT THE WEEK BEFORE HE FACES HIS OPPONENT FOR THE LEADERSHIP, PERES, IN THE LABOR PARTY CONVENTION.

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5. ALTHOUGH IT HAS NOT BEEN STATED IN PUBLIC, ISRAELI OFFICIALS NOW TELL US THAT THE FAMOUS "RED LINE" RUNS FROM JUST SOUTH OF NABATIYAH TO THE COAST BELOW SIDON. MOST ISRAELIS HAVE GENERALLY ASSUMED THE RED LINE RUNS ALONG THE LITANI RIVER. IN ANY EVENT THE PRESENCE OF SYRIAN TROOPS ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF NABATIYAH ONLY A FEW KILOMETERS FROM THE ISRAELI BORDER IS A CAUSE FOR CONCERN, ALTHOUGH IT SHOULD BE POINTED OUT THAT ONLY A FEW MONTHS AGO ISRAELI AUTHORITIES WERE TELLING US THAT THEY WERE PLEASED WITH THE WAY THE SYRIAN FORCES WERE BEING DEPLOYED IN LEBANON SINCE THAT BROKE UP THEIR POWERFUL CONCENTRATION ON THE GOLAN HEIGHTS. NOW THE FEAR IS THEY MAY HAVE COME TO SOUTH LEBANON TO STAY, AND FEW ISRAELIS ARE WILLING TO CREDIT THE SYRIANS WITH BENEVOLENT INTENTIONS ANYWHERE.

6. IF THERE IS NOT SOME EVIDENCE OF A TROOP PULLBACK BY THE TIME OF THE SECRETARY'S ARRIVAL, THE SITUATION IN

SOTH LEBANON WILL PROBABLY CONSUME AN INORDINATE AMOUNT OF TIME DURING THE SECRETARY'S DISCUSSION WHICH COULD MORE USEFULLY BE DEVOTED TO OBTAINING THE ISRAELI VIEW ON THE PROSPECTS OF A MOVEMENT TOWARD PEACE.

7. FRO HERE,THE BEST COURSE STILL SEEMS WHAT THE DEPARTMENT PROPOSED WHEN THE PROBLEM FIRST BECAME EVIDENT: THE REPLACEMENT OF ASF (SYRIAN) TROOPS IN THE SOUTH BY A FORCE OF LEBANESE.UNTIL THAT CAN BE DONE, WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO MAKE CLEAR TO THE ISRAELIS THE BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF ESTABLISHING LEBANON AS A VIABLE AND PEAEFUL STAE AGAIN,AND WE SHOULD REFUSE TO ACCEPT THE RESPONSIBILITY OR BLAME FOR ANY FAILURE OF THE SYRIANS (IN THE ASF) TO WITHDRAW,UNFORTUNATE AS THAT MAY BE. IN OUR VIEW THE U.S. IS USING ITS GOOD OFFICES IN TRANSMITTING COMMUNICATIONS IN ORDER TO DEFUSE WHAT COULD BE A DANGEROUS SITUATION. IT IS IN NO SENSE A TEST OF U.S.

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MUSCLE OR WILLPOWER. THAT,HOWEVER,IS THE WAY IT IS INCREASINGLY BEING PRESENTED TO THE ISRAELI PUBLIC.
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Message Attributes

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